



STEVE JONES
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Real Estate Exec: Merlin Contracting and Developing

Custom Home Building: A Family Affair

by: Michelle Savage

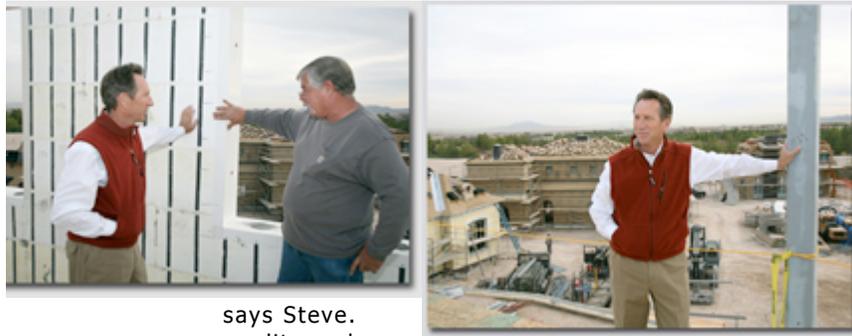
As the Las Vegas Real Estate market has grown over the past several years, so has the custom home market. This market segment is one of the fastest growing areas of Las Vegas Real Estate, proving itself a winner even throughout the recent slump. Local builders like Stephen Jones, co-owner of Merlin Contracting and Developing, LLC, are confident a demand for their products exists, regardless of economic conditions.

Twenty-five years ago, few would have guessed that Steve Jones, a gaming employee, and his brother Bart, a macadamia nut farmer, would be operating a successful custom home building company. But their lives changed when Steve decided to build his own custom home in 1983.

Steve developed a passion for custom homes during this time and started working with a contractor friend building custom homes for local clients. It reached the point where he was so busy working on other people's homes that he put his own custom home plans aside. When his friend retired in 1989, he took the plunge and started his own company, Merlin Contracting and Developing. A few years later Bart joined the company making it a family affair and taking the business to a new level. "Bart runs the office while I run the field," says Steve. "He's great with computers and has really taken the company into the modern world. It's a great partnership."

Family businesses are nothing new to Steve and his wife, Anne. Two of Steve's brothers are attorneys like their father. Steve's son, Tyler, is following in his father's footsteps, running Blue Heron Properties. The company recently completed their first project and won this year's Golden Nugget Award for design, a national award that Steve calls "the Oscar or Emmy of the design world." His other son, Jordan, is managing a family restaurant started in 1913 by his maternal great-grandfather.

Today, with a meticulous approach to luxury home construction, Merlin Contracting and Developing provides clients with a unique and high-quality product, as well as the experience of helping clients create and build their dream homes. The brothers' numerous clients include entertainers, lawyers, doctors, and casino executives from around the country. "Our clients are unique in that they are high-end and sophisticated customers that know and demand quality," says Steve. "As a result, we have challenging projects and one-of-a-kind results."



says Steve.
quality and
which are truly the best of the best.”

To meet the level of service and quality their clients expect, the brothers only work with architects, designers and other subcontractors that meet their first-class criteria. “We only employ subcontractors who can bring the right craft-hands to put the pieces of the puzzle together for us,” “They have to understand the level of service that goes into building our homes,

After just a few minutes of conversation, it is clear that Steve’s reputation as a custom home builder is built on old school values and ethics, and that he is driven by customer satisfaction. When it comes to his solid work ethic and honest approach to business, Steve attributes this to his father. “My dad is still practicing law at 93,” he says. “Once a week for the past 20 years, my dad, my five brothers and I have met at the Las Vegas Country Club for lunch—just the boys. We’ve learned a lot from him, especially the importance of being honest. Because of my dad’s reputation in Las Vegas, we’ve gotten 25 to 30 million dollars’ worth of business just on a handshake.”

Both Steve and Anne are natives of Las Vegas, with family histories spanning several decades. Steve’s grandparents came to the city in the 1930s, while Anne’s family arrived in the 1920s. Steve grew up just six blocks away from Anne, although the couple never met until they both happened to visit Central Africa at the same time. “I was there opening a cattle ranch,” he says. “The cattle ranch didn’t work out but I got a great wife and kids out of it.”

Steve’s love for his business really shines through when he talks about custom home design. He describes homes that are not only the ultimate in luxurious living, but also truly represent the people who live within them. For example, he is currently working on a 20,000-square-foot home in the southern end of Las Vegas, which consists of five buildings on three acres of land. The design is reminiscent of an old French village, replicating the look and feel of the 1800s. Like many of his custom homes, the property combines original layouts with artistic touches to recreate the look and feel of old-world European mansions, while including many of today’s most desired features, luxuries and amenities.

“To really make the owners’ and architects’ visions for that old-world look and feel come to life, we use materials from France and other parts of Europe,” he says. “The idea is to create an authentic design. A rooftop from hundreds of years ago simply cannot be purchased from a factory.”

In many ways the Jones’ custom homes also incorporate “green building”—the industry trend that refers to environmentally-friendly construction. The brothers—who embraced green building years before it became a hot topic—use many techniques to provide environmentally friendly features for their clients. For example, they use Arxx walls and foundations, which are stay-in-place insulating concrete forms (ICFs) that improve energy efficiency and air quality. “More and more customers are asking for green features these days,” says Steve. “They are interested in helping the environment and saving money in the long run.”

So what’s next for Steve and Merlin Contracting and Developing? “We’re not slowing down, that’s for sure,” he says. He sees Las Vegas as a very strong custom home market. The demand is still strong, even though the tract home development business has waned in the past few years. “It’s a great business to be in—it’s lots of fun and very rewarding,” he says. “Probably the best part of the job is the satisfaction of watching someone come home to their dream house for the first time.”

To maintain a life/work balance, Steve stays on top of his numerous hobbies, which include fly-fishing, snow skiing and hiking. And building his own custom home remains on Steve’s list of long-term goals. “I never completed my own home but it’s still my dream to do so,” he says. “We live in a very nice tract home but I have plans to build a custom home when I retire. As you can imagine, I have lots of ideas.”

Merlin Contracting and Developing, LLC can be reached at (702) 257-8102 or visit their Web site at www.merlincontracting.com.

Photography: Britt Pierson

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